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AUTHOR Sherman, Nancy E.
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ABSTRACT

All Individuals Deserve Support (AIDS) is a collaborative prevention program between graduate students in a Community/Agency Counseling program and the Children's Home Homeless Youth Program in Peoria, Illinois. Graduate students developed a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention program for homeless youth as a class project. Project design involved: assessing the needs of the target population; developing prevention activities; implementing the program; and evaluating the program. Students worked in cooperative groups throughout the program. They collected information of such programs via the Internet and more traditional sources. Guest speakers addressed the class on the topic of interest. Students developed interview questions and interviewed the case managers who worked most closely with the homeless youth. The interviews indicated that case managers were very concerned about their clients' unprotected sexual activity and attitudes toward casual sex. Case managers noted that the most effective types of programs were highly interactive and had meaning for daily living challenges. Students implemented the program with clients from the Homeless Youth Program. To support the case managers, students developed a resource library, conducted inservice training for direct service providers, and offered a psychoeducational group for clients on self-esteem and assertiveness. Each aspect of the program was evaluated via activity logs, portfolios, and participant feedback. Both case managers and clients considered the program very good and very helpful. (SM)

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All Individuals Deserve Support: Collaborating to Prevent HIV/AIDS Among Homeless Youth

Nancy E. Sherman
College of Education & Health Sciences
Bradley University

American Association of Colleges For Teacher Education
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All Individuals Deserve Support: Collaborating to Prevent HIV/AIDS Among Homeless Youth

HIV/AIDS Prevention among homeless youth presents additional challenges for counselors and educators. All Individuals Deserve Support (AIDS) is a collaborative prevention program between graduate students in Community/Agency Counseling and The Children's Home, Homeless Youth Program. Twenty graduate students participated in developing a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention program for homeless youth as a class project in a course titled Community Counseling. The goals for the course include providing students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective community counseling of which a major focus is prevention. This project met those goals in several ways: (a) students worked cooperatively as a team to plan, develop, and implement a prevention program; (b) students acquired first hand knowledge of community resources available and how to access those resources, and (c) students learned the process for developing community/agency based prevention programs from the initial stage of assessment to the final evaluation.

Introduction

Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS among the population has been the focus of much research and program development in the last two decades. Although many groups of people at higher risk for the transmission of HIV/AIDS have shown a decline in the number of new cases reported, the number of new cases reported among youth is on the rise. Of those youth most vulnerable to infection are those prone to high risk behavior due to homelessness. Homeless youth engage in higher rates of high risk behavior such as unprotected sex and drug abuse due to

a variety of factors, including survival. The impact of homelessness on the development of effective prevention programs is great. Many times, the homeless youth does not have access to education about AIDS/HIV because he or she is not connected with the usual sources of school, family or community. The development of this prevention program was an effort to learn from local, national and international sources about the unique needs of homeless youth in preventing HIV/AIDS and to develop and implement a comprehensive program tailored to homeless youth. The objectives of the project were twofold: (a) to learn the process of prevention program development through developing and implementing an actual prevention program, and (b) to learn effective ways to prevent HIV/AIDS among homeless youth and incorporate this knowledge in the development of a prevention program for the Homeless Youth Program.

Design

The overall design of the project encompassed four phases: (a) assessment of the needs of the target population, (b) development of prevention activities to meet those needs, (c) implementation of the program, and (d) evaluation of the total program and component parts. Students worked in cooperative groups through each phase of the design. Since there were twenty students, four groups of five were used. During class time work, group members were assigned roles such as reporter, recorder, time-keeper, and facilitator to assist with the group process. Work outside of class was structured as students desired. At the end of one phase, students had the option to work with a different group.

During the assessment phase each group was assigned separate areas to gather data to avoid overlap in information gathering. One group developed interview questions and interviewed the professional staff who worked most closely with homeless youth. One group

gathered data through the Internet. One group gathered data from area agencies that provide information and/or services for HIV/AIDS prevention. The final group used traditional sources in the counseling, prevention, and social science literature to gather information. In addition, guest speakers in class included a faculty member from Illinois State Univerity whose research focus is HIV/AIDS prevention and a former homeless youth who had successfully completed the Homeless Youth Program.

Each group shared the information gathered about homeless youth and HIV/AIDS and through group discussion synthesizing the material, the process of goal setting commenced. The format for developing goals included each group sharing their brainstorming ideas and then through consensus of the entire class, developing final goals.

Each group was then assigned a goal from which to brainstorm ideas for activities that would accomplish the goal. When the activities were formulated and agreed upon, students were provided with the opportunity to decide with which activity they wanted to work. After developing a detailed plan for the prevention activity, along with resources needed and an evaluation component, the total prevention program was created from the activities of the five groups. The program was implemented by the students with clients from the Homeless Youth Program at The Children's Home. Clients and professional staff provided evaluative information for further development of the prevention program. At the end of the project, students evaluated themselves, their peers, and the program.

Outcome

Students chose the name, "All Individuals Deserve Support (AIDS)" for the prevention program. In the assessment phase, two areas of information gathering were targeted: current

research about homeless youth and their needs; and prevention of HIV/AIDS. One group of students developed a series of interview questions and interviewed the case managers who work closely with the homeless youth on a daily basis. Examples of questions include: (a) How would you describe the typical homeless youth; (b) Are there particular types of programming that they are more open to than other types; and (c) What type of AIDS prevention has occurred and what was valuable and not valuable.

Information gathered from case managers was the most helpful in terms of how to work with their clients. Eighty-five per cent of the clients are pregnant or parenting and are primarily female between the ages of 14 and 16. The homeless youth come from all walks of life and are out of their homes due to sexual abuse, parental problems, and drugs/alcohol abuse among other reasons. According to the case managers, the most effective types of programs are highly interactive and have meaning for daily living challenges. The case managers were very concerned about the amount of unprotected sexual activity among their clients and their clients' attitudes toward "casual" sex (S. Houston, personal communication, September 9, 1997).

Other groups of students reviewed articles and reports from sources such as journals, government studies, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. These sources agreed on several major points that guided the development of the prevention program: (a) homeless youth are at greater risk for contracting (HIV/AIDS; (b) information, attitudes, skills building, and access to services are critical links in prevention, and (c) prevention program should be nonjudgmental in approach and structured to help youth learn how to make healthy choices about sexuality (Osburn & Rogers, 1994).

Based on the research and needs assessment, the following program goals were established: (a) to educate Homeless Youth Case Managers in HIV/AIDS prevention information and methods for the purpose of ongoing education and support of their clients; (b) to incorporate homeless youth into program development and implementation; (c) to provide client specific information materials; and (d) to integrate the program into existing services as appropriate.

The activities designed to meet these goals included developing a resource library consisting of client-appropriate brochures, pamphlets, videos, books and other materials organized for accessibility and housed in the offices of the homeless youth program. The resource library developed by the students was a three volume set which included one volume for staff and two for clients. Materials were collected from many sources and ordering information for additional copies included in order to keep the library stocked. All materials were previewed with adolescents to judge readability and appeal to that age group.

A second activity consisted of an in service training program for the case managers who provide direct service and support to their homeless clients. The three hour training consisted of sharing current information about AIDS/HIV and its transmission as well as how to talk to clients about prevention and where to go for additional assistance. Students developed a notebook of resource material for case managers that included information about HIV/AIDS transmission, statistics, prevention, resources and a contract to use with clients. Through quizzes, videos, role-plays and presentations, case managers learned information and participated in skill building activities designed to increase awareness and confidence in helping clients.

A third activity consisted of a three-part psycho educational group for clients focused on developing self-esteem and assertiveness. Students compiled a group design for each session

including worksheets and information for the group leader on how to present the group activities. Topics for the group included self-awareness, values, self-esteem, goal setting, assertiveness, conflict resolution and healthy relationships. A manual for the group was developed with the intent that each new counselor working with the Homeless Youth Program could run the group with the information provided.

The initial activity, designed to serve as an "attention-grabber" was a pizza dinner and talk with a young person living with AIDS. At the last minute, the speaker was unable to attend so a counselor from the University of Illinois College of Medicine's AIDS Clinic spoke to the homeless youth. Area merchants donated gift certificates for food and merchandise that were used as door prizes to increase attendance. Students provided babysitting services for those clients with children. Thirteen homeless youth attended the event and evaluated it as very worthwhile and informative. Many participants commented on how impressed they were that university students cared enough to sponsor this program for them. The Coordinator of the Homeless Youth Program praised the program as the greatest success they had ever had with a prevention program.

Evaluation

Each aspect of the program was evaluated by the planners and the participants. Evaluation for grading purposes consisted of an activity log and a portfolio completed by each student as well as an evaluation of the student by his or her group members. The activity log was a listing and description of all activities related to the project and the time involved. The portfolio included all materials found and developed as part of the project. At the initial group meeting, students were assigned the task of developing a method for evaluating the contribution of each

group member. Groups developed the criteria for evaluation based on their expectations of themselves and each other in the group process. The instructor assigned a grade for participation based on the group evaluation and the activity log for individuals and a single group grade for the group's performance in the program. At the end of the semester, students complete a course evaluation designed to assess the instructor's teaching and the students' satisfaction with their learning. The opportunity for written comments concerning the course under "teaching activities" provided the basis for evaluation of the students' learning associated with the project. Student comments regarding the prevention project included, "I've learned more from this project and the people I worked with than any other so far" and "This was an excellent learning opportunity, working with real clients was so much more satisfying and assisted in my understanding of what I will face after graduation."

Evaluations of the various components from the participants included feedback from clients, case managers, and the Director of the Homeless Youth Program. Case managers rated the in service program in the "very good" to "excellent" range with an average overall score for the training 4.6 out of a possible 5. Evaluative comments included, "Very good job in covering the necessary information. The manual seems to be something that will be very useful" and "All questions were answered, very helpful information." For further training, participants asked for more of the history of AIDS and more role-playing situations with clients.

Homeless youth who attended the pizza dinner and speaker about HIV/AIDS evaluated the helpfulness of the information presented as an average of 4.6 with 5 corresponding to "very helpful." Responses to the question, "What was most helpful?" included the following: "The knowledge about AIDS and knowing how to go get the information. The most important thing is

knowing that there are so many people who care."; "The fact that we all sat down and talked."; and "I always find group discussion most helpful." As a result of this project, an Intern Counselor from the counseling program will work each year in the Homeless Youth Program, facilitating the psycho educational group developed for the project.

Valuable lessons were learned by the student planners about the organization and administration of prevention programs. The planners also learned a great deal about HIV/AIDS and its transmission, information that will be valuable to them in whatever counseling setting they choose to work. The challenge for both planners and participants continues to be the same for prevention workers in all areas, namely what interventions work with what individuals and how to be comprehensive enough for change to occur.

References

Osburn, J. & Rogers, D. (1994). Preventing HIV/AIDS in adolescents. Journal of School Health, 64,1 p. 39.